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AUTHOR	Duncan, Ronald J.
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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the conceptualization and design of anthropological film in Colombia since the 1960's. The intent has been to establish this type of film as a culturally appropriate communication technique related to the solution of social problems and involving the expression of culturally specific values. The paper describes the historical perspective, and defines and gives examples of three major conceptualizations of anthropological film: (1) denunciation films; (2) cultural pride films; and (3) conscientization films to be shown back to the same people who appear in the films. Based on previous field research, conscientization films are designed to provide a cognitive stimulus for self-evaluation as a basis for locally-formulated social change solutions. The films of foreign anthropologists and the current state of anthropological film in Colombia are also considered. (KP)

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ANTHROPOLOGICAL FILM IN COLOMBIA

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by

RONALD J. DUNCAN
Director
Department of Social Science
Inter American University
San Germán, Puerto Rico
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IR005 269

Anthropological Film in Colombia

The conceptualization and design of anthropological film in Colombia since the mid 1960's has been aimed primarily at participating in the social process of the larger society. The intent has been to establish anthropological film as a culturally appropriate communication technique related to the solution of social problems and involving the expression of culturally specific values. The result has been the development of a tradition of anthropological film that is not simply ethnographic, nor is it strictly applied anthropology in the North American sense of the term; rather it is a participation in the communicative aspects of the socio-cultural process.

1. Historical perspective.

The first film of anthropological value that is known to have been made in Colombia was in the 1930's. The Spanish historian and anthropologist, Juan Friede, made a silent film describing the archaeological site of San Agustín. From then until the mid-1970's no other films of archaeological value were made. In fact no other anthropological films were realized until the mid-1960's. However, the decade from the mid-1960's to the mid-1970's has been marked by a growing momentum in the production of anthropological films, and distinct conceptualizations of anthropological film have developed.

What is included as anthropological film in this paper are those films produced by anthropologists for professional purposes and films produced by filmmakers about anthropological subjects and with some assistance from anthropologically trained people. Films made by non-Colombians with no imput from Colombians are excluded. Films in which non-Colombians participated are included if there was a significant collaboration with a Colombian professional.

2. Approaches to anthropological film.

Three major conceptualization of anthropological film have developed in the last decade in Colombia, including films whose primary purpose is denunciation, conscientization,and expression of cultural pride. Denunciation films have played the role of investigative journalism among marginal and powerless groups. Social and economic exploitation is denounced before national audiences to build pressure to ease or eliminate it. Conscientization films have been used primarily among peasant groups to raise their information levels about themselves in relation to the national society. These films have been designed to specifically deal with some of the cognitive results of other mass media. Other, more lyrical, films have concentrated on the description of the beauty and uniqueness of Colombian groups and traditions, and in this way have served as a means of expressing and re-enforcing cultural pride. Lack of mastery of technical problems and low budgets plague anthropological filmmakers in Colombia. The results frequently cut down on the effectiveness of the films.

Cultural pride films.

Gabriela Samper made the first contemporary, Colombian anthropological film ("The Mountaintop of Cumanday" 1964) with the North American cameraman, Ray Witlin. Over the next six years she made four other films of the same type that can be termed "cultural pride" films. In the early 1970's her production stopped due to political problems and a jail sentence. Eventually she was released and traveled out of the country. After a debilitating illness she died in 1974, thus ending her seminal contribution to anthropological film in Colombia.

Her films deal with mythology, traditional ceremonies, a peasant religious group, and a worker in a salt mine. In all but one instance her films deal with peasants from the Colombian Andes and adjacent valleys. Her films do not agonize over injustices; rather, they are celebrations of the creativity and vitality of peasant life styles. She respected peasants and portrayed them as real human beings dealing with the normal joys and sorrows of life.

"The Mountaintop of Cumanday" (1964, Color, 16mm) is a lyrical portrayal of a peasant story in which an adolescent boy encounters the ghost of a man in the ruins of an old adobe house. The boy loses his father in the fright and goes through a series of adventures, continually encountering the apparition, until he arrives alone and frightened to an isolated mountaintop, a paramo. There he and the apparition do battle with swords on horseback until the ghost disappears. The boy is found, his fear is conquered, and he is happy.

The paramo, or mountaintop, is a place that has special emotional power to many Colombian peasants and Indians. This film portrays the mythological account of a young man conquering his fear of unknown, invisible, yet powerful forces in life.

"The Conquered Jungle" (1966, Color, 16mm) is Samper's only anthropological film made outside of her favorite mountainous region of Colombia. This is a short film on an Amazonian Indian group which includes some description of daily life. Hunting and fishing techniques which permit these people to subsist in the jungle are shown. This is her weakest film in techniques and conceptualization.

"The Salt Man" (1968, Black and white, 16mm) describes the normal work of a man in a small, salt industry in a small town near Bogota. The work is physically difficult, and the remuneration is slight, however the film portrays the man as having created a viable life style out of those meager elements.

"The Saintly Brothers" (1970, Black and white, 16mm) some salient features of life style of a small religious group that dresses itself in burlap clothes. This peasant group from the state of Tolima tried to cut itself off from the national society during the period of violence in the late 40's and 50's. It was a time of considerable fear for peasants because vigilante groups from the two major political parties preyed on suspected members of the enemy party. Peasants were particularly susceptible because of living in isolated rural areas, thus devoid of protection of neighbors. Out of that setting emerged this group.

"Cundinamarca Folklore Festival" (1970, Black and white, 16mm) is a filmic documentation of traditional dances and other events typically performed in small towns in the area of Bogota during patron saint festivals or other special days.

Gabriela Samper brought filmmaking to contemporary anthropologists in Colombia. She set the example and showed that it could be done. Her style of work has not be continued by any other anthropologist, but she has a secure and leading position in the history of anthropological film in Colombia.

Denunciation film.

Denunciation films act as omsbudmen for socially and economically marginal groups in an effort to communicate with the larger national society. These

films document exploitive and unjust social situations in order to show them to urban audiences to build pressure to end or alter the exploitation.

This film genre began developing just four years after the initial work by Samper. It was adopted by a number of different filmmakers, and it became the preferred film form during the late 60's and the early to middle 70's. International attention, and awards, have been gained by some of these films.

Denunciation films are based on previous and on-going research in the social situation being filmed. In the films listed below an anthropologist was always involved in the investigation. Once the social and economic relationships had been previously established by research the filming was done. These films have a data base which is used to lend scientific strength to their moral statement.

Marta Rodriguez and Jorge Silva have established themselves as the foremost exponents of denunciation film. Their two films are "The Brickyards" (1972, Black adn white, 16mm, 42 minutes) and "Planas" (1971, Black and white, 16mm). "The Brickyards" is a film about the people who make bricks in the southern-most, and poorest, barrios of Bogota. The physical harshness of their work and their lack of remuneration (only pennies a day) are shown. Their relationships with the owners is one of extreme subordination, almost peonage. However, the physical drudgery, the greyness of the Bogota sky, and the grinding poverty are broken by a simple celebration of first communion for their young daughter who drifts along the edge of the mud pits in the idealized purity of her white dress. This film is the best known anthropological film in Colombia, and it has received wide public attention. It has won several national and international documentary film awards.

Their other film, "Planas", is a post hoc treatment of an army massacre of Indians in the plains area in eastern Colombia. It is a series of interviews with Indians from the area. The interviews are carried out in a studio and do not give a good filmic result.

In addition to Rodriguez and Silva, "La Rosca" (The Clique) has produced two other films of this type, "Sea and Town" (1972, Black and white, 16mm) and "The Hour of the Axman" (1972, Black and white, 16mm). Orlando Fals Borda, a sociologist is a central figure in "La Rosca" and assisted the anthropological structuring of these two films. The authors stated that they were doing "militant social research" combined with "social action". (Mayolo and Arbelaez, 1974) Their research was based on participant observation and the conclusions were checked with the research subjects. However, the research preparation is mostly lost by inappropriate filmmaking techniques. The narrative is sociological, cold and distant. Much of the two films is shot through long lenses, far from what is being filmed. People appear too infrequently, so that the viewer knows more about the river and house architecture than about people.

These films were made on the Pacific lowlands of Colombia and are primarily concerned to show the exploitation of the natural resources of the region by foreign lumber companies. The films have had little impact and have received limited distribution.

Nina S. de Friedemann, one of the senior research anthropologists of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology, made "The Feast of the Indian in Quibdo" (1971, Color, 8mm, 20 minutes). Friedemann shows how Indians are drawn into town from their communities scattered along the river banks by Black and white merchants. They are invited to special feasts in which they are given clothes

and quantities of liquor in a dual attempt to civilize them and to keep them as trading partners. The exploitative characteristics of the feast were graphically portrayed. Partly as a result of the film the practice was eventually curtailed.

Denunciation films are an attempt to cross the rigid barriers of the powerful Colombian social class structure. They are an attempt to call attention to the worst injustices caused by that system. The purposes are mixed. In some films the desire is to ameliorate the situation and improve the lot of the people involved. In other instances the purpose is to show the corruption of the capitalist system, drawing the conclusion that revolution is inevitable.

Conscientization films.

Following suggestions made by Paulo Freire (1970;1970A) on approaching social change and economic development as an informational process, Nina S. de Friedemann and Ronald J. Duncan collaborated in the production of a series of four films on Colombian peasants which can be described as applied anthropological films.

Each of these films is based on previous field research. These films were designed as conscientization films to be shown back to the same people who appear in the films. The purpose is to provide an emotionally powerful cognitive stimulus which facilitates new elements for self-evaluation to the local people. In each instance the subject population is an economically deprived and socially marginal group. The films are designed to provide a stimulus for more precise local definitions of well-being and to stimulate the generation of locally-formulated social change solutions. The series covers the three major types of Colombian groups: those of European descent,

African descent, and Andean Indian descent. All four communities have land problems that limit their participation in the larger national economy.

"Guelmambi" (1973, Black and white, 16mm, 23 minutes) is the first of these films. This film describes family organization, residence, and subsistence patterns of isolated Black gold miners in the tropical rain forest of the Pacific lowlands. Corporate family groups are owners of mining rights to river terraces, and the riverine settlements are organized around those family groups. The film is based on five years of anthropological research and analysis by Dr. Friedemann of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology. The people who live in the jungle areas along the Guelmambi River are scorned by the towns people of Barbacoas (their only contact with national society) as being uncivilized. This film was made to provide a vicarious learning experience in which townspeople could see the creativity and vitality of the people in the riverine communities and hence ungrade their assigned human value.

The next three films were conceptualized as a series. This is the only instance in which a series was consciously designed and produced to have communication value as a series. Each film deals with a different ethnic, racial group, but each has the same problem of shortage of land divided into mini-farms. The first film is a low-key introduction to the general problems of small peasant farms; the second is a stronger statement of specific needs in which members of one community demand attention to their problems; the third shows a community that is aggresively and innovatively solving many of its economic problems and as such represents a success story.

"Paredes de Piedra" (1973, Color, 16 mm, 25 minutes) describes the farming and marketing situation of the small farmers in the Caqueza Valley of central Colombia who are of European descent. The words of the people are used to describe their life and problems. Many see the problems of the small farmer as being insoluble, and they leave to migrate to the city. A barrio in Bogota which has inhabitants from Caqueza is shown, including the housing and health problems. The purpose is to present documentation of the state of well-being to provide a factually based stimulus for peasant evaluation and conscientization about their situation. The film is based on six months previous anthropological research among the Caqueza farmers.

"Villarrica" (1974, Black and white, 16mm, 25 minutes) portrays the definition of community, land, work, and well-being made by Black peasant farmers of the Cauca Valley. Based on six months of previous anthropological research and interviews, the film includes definition by the local people of their community and the barriers to well-being as they see them.

"Guambianos" (1974, Black and white, 16mm, 25 minutes) gives a basic description of this Andean Indian group including their society, family organization, economic patterns, traditions, and social change. In the last generation they have gone through a period of rapid social and economic change that is striking among Colombian small farmers. The film delineates the role of cultural and group identity as a factor in their social change experience.

These conscientization films are designed to affect cognitive change in such a way as to facilitate social change and development without violating the structure of the cultural system of the peasant group. The messages that peasants normally receive about themselves from mass media are usually negative

ones although theirown self image is usually positive. These films are intended to ease that problem of cognitive dissonance by giving them a re-inforcing image of themselves. The first film is a gentle statement to the effect that it can be good to be a peasant. The second film shows how specific problems can be identified to improve well-being. The third film shows that some positive results can be gained.

Films by foreign anthropologists.

A number of non-Colombian anthropologists have done filming in Colombia over the last decade. Brian Moser of Grenada Films (British), Jan Klejn(Danish), Adrianne DeLuz (French), and Thomas Schorr (North American) have done anthropological documentary work with different groups.

3. The current state of anthropological film in Colombia

The Colombian Institute of Anthropology is nominally encouraging the development of anthropological film in Colombia. The Institute is actively collecting all anthropological films dealing with Colombia and periodically makes showings of these films. The Institute is also interested in encouraging anthropological film production and has financially aided some efforts. However, budgetary limitations prohibit extensive involvement in production. Furthermore, the activity of foreign anthropological filmmakers has been drastically reduced due to Resolution 626 Bis which was promulgated in 1973. No such activity can be initiated without approval by the Institute and approval is contingent on substantial collaboration with the Institute. Many foreign anthropologists and filmmakers have been unable or unwilling to comply with the Institute's requirements; and as a result, foreign participation in anthropological film in Colombia has diminished. Outside of these factors the production of anthropological film in Colombia continues through the individual efforts of anthropologists, particularly Rodriguez, Silva, and Friedemann.

The unique contribution of anthropological film in Colombia to the international development of an anthropological theory on visual communication is the possibility of combining scientifically sound film based on research with film that deals with and communicates to specific problems in the society. Visual communication is a powerful force in society, and anthropological film can participate in that social process in a way that is scientifically valid and socially responsible.

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